

Parshat Beshalach Considering Return

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Parshat Beshalach begins with a curious statement: "...When Pharaoh sent the people out... God did not lead them by way of the Land of the Philistines, because it was close, for God said, 'Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war and they will return to Egypt.'...The Children of Israel were armed when they went out from Egypt."

Bnei Yisroel had been subjugated to harsh enslavement for hundreds of years. Now they bore witness to a miraculous salvation. Could they doubt Hashem's ability to continue to be with them? Why would they want to return to their previous condition? But perhaps conditions had changed. So Hashem had to prove to *Bnei Yisroel* that the Egyptians still hated them and were now pursuing them. *Bnei Yisroel* would face reality and not want to return, writes the Be'er Yosef.

People are generally afraid of change, and moving forward requires change notes the Ohr Daniel and Chochmat Hamatzpun. We choose what we see to reinforce what we want to do. Using this psychology, the yetzer horo was playing with normal human weaknesses. It is so hard to take the first step toward growth, whether psychological or spiritual. We must push ourselves to make the extra brachah, to get up and go to the shiur, or any other increase in observance, and even in our sensitivity and response to others.

How can we subdue the yetzer horo? The Netivot Shalom explains, the short term approach is to ask Hashem to free us from its

clutches. The more effective approach is to work hard to get rid of the source of the problem and ask for Hashem's help in our efforts. This way, we eliminate the source of the yetzer horo's power.

This was the plan of Hashem. While our faith was a gift from Hashem when He took us out of Egypt, we had to fortify it within ourselves by our own actions. Otherwise, although we were physically redeemed from Egypt, we would still be enslaved to the Egyptian mentality. Hashem brought us to *Yam Suf* so that we would be forced to act on our faith and solidify it by jumping into the Sea, thereby breaking the psychological ties to Egypt. This is the model for each of us as we face our challenges. Hashem is always with us ready to help us, but He is waiting for us to take that first leap of faith. It takes both our own self sacrifice and effort along with Hashem's help to overcome the power of the yetzer horo.

Hashem wanted us to retain our free choice even after our miraculous redemption, explains the Steipler Gaon z"l. Would we follow Him faithfully when difficulties arose, or would we revert to our earlier slave mentality? The circuitous route with the Sea in front of us clarified the choice. Just as we have this choice to leave good and do evil, we have a similar choice when confronted with evil to choose to do good. Man's physical aspect can be likened to a horse, explains the Letitcha Elyon. Unless it is controlled by the rider, it will run amok. We must take back the reins and control our "horse." If we fall, adds Rabbi Pliskin, we must quickly get up and regain control. It was not the spiritual part of the Jew

that wanted to return to Egypt, but the physical part that prefers the status quo.

Likewise Rabbi Schwadron z"l interprets *ki karov hu* that it is near to us. People prefer the comfort of the familiar. *Bnei Yisroel* were familiar with the challenges of slavery, but were not familiar with the challenges of war, and so they were ready to return to Egypt. Similarly, we are familiar with our spiritual level and find it difficult to make changes. But once we make a change and practice that improvement regularly, that stage becomes the norm and we can begin working on another point of improvement. The trick is to act immediately at the moment of inspiration so the impetus for change does not pass. Each day should be a day of spiritual growth, even if with only one brachah, writes the Ohr Daniel. That is the only way to counteract the daily onslaught of the yetzer horo which understands that people are afraid to change. Minefields surround us. True freedom writes Rabbi Weinberg z"l "is the ability to say, 'I choose not to partake.'"

Hashem was concerned that a momentary thought would undermine the entire structure of what He had done for them. Therefore, He took them on a circuitous route. Similarly, although to a much lesser degree, we can ruin the entire worth of a *mitzvah*, writes Rabbi S. Grosbard. If we suddenly feel a moment of remorse in doing a *mitzvah*, we are undermining its entire value. Embrace the *mitzvah*, and know that sometimes the extra effort or time is the circuitous route Hashem is specifically giving us so that we may come closer to Him.

Brit Milah: Part 2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The Maharal often talks about numbers as a way of quantifying reality. Everything physical has borders. The borders one uses to describe something tells us what it is. Numbers look at reality at a different angle than words. They tell you what the properties and potentials of something is. The number one could mean the beginning of a series, which means that you have an idea of what the end should be and this is the first step. Or you could see it as a complete entity, in terms of the structure and the eternal reality that oneness conveys.

Brit mila is performed on the 8th day. In Hebrew, eight is *shemona*. The root of the word is *shemen*, oil. If you put oil in other liquids it rises. The number eight signifies above everything. Oil is transcendental. It's above physical nature. Likewise, circumcision on the eighth day tells us that for Jews the

transcendental world is part of their reality, specifically in areas of life where nobody thinks it can be transcendental. All exploitations begins in the mind. The opposite is also true. Marital unity generates continuity of generations which is where eternity is in this world. The relationship between husband and wife can be profound. He becomes what fills her. She becomes his vessel. It's a unity that is spiritual, not just physical.

Why is there no *brit* for a woman? A woman's body inherently gives her a sense of connection. Yet woman sometimes turn into prey through their own choices. A woman wearing an extremely tight outfit is really saying, "Look at me as a physical person, not as a spiritual person." Woman do this because they long for connection which is cemented through physical desire. The tikkun there isn't *brit milah*, but being a person of innerness, a

person of modesty.

Very much in tune with this is *pidyon haben*. It must be the first son born to the wife because this child turned the woman into a mother and this is very much her essential being. The father says this child belongs to Hashem. The officiating kohen stands in so to speak as the representative of Hashem. The kohen asks, do you want your child or do you want to give me five *shekels*? The father says, take the *shekels*. This teaches us that dedicating one's child to Hashem demands effort and self-sacrifice. Attending a *pidyon haben* equals 84 fasts because it is an act of dedication that parallels negating one's body of its desires. The mother and father who brought this child into being affirm their total dedication to Hashem. That dedication is a source of joy because what we want most of all is spiritual connection.

Eishes Chayil Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Hochheimer

The Midrash parallels the first verse of *Eishet Chayil* with Avraham and Sarah. "Od yinuvin b'seiva; They shall still bring forth in old age." Avraham and Sarah were one in charity and good deeds. How do we choose and maintain good relationships? It's not just about getting along with other people. It's finding and keeping the people who complete us, who make us feel that we can become our best selves. Avraham had a vision of what was right and wrong and stood up for it. He married Sarai who became his true partner, committed to his visions and goals. When they moved from Charan, the Torah tells us, "They took the souls they made." Rashi tells us Avraham converted the men and Sarai worked with the women and it is as if they made them. They lived in *Eretz Canaan* for 10 years and they had no children. Then Sarai placed a rival, Hagar, in her home so her husband could realize his potential. This was a heroic act. At 99, Avraham circumcised himself. He went outside to search for guests, while Sara stood over an oven baking bread on the hottest day of the year. She was not only the proactive *kiruv* professional willing to sacrifice and make groundbreaking choices, she was in the kitchen working hands on to help Avraham fulfill the *mitzva* of *hachnosot*

orchim.

There was a third level of partnership and perhaps this was Sarah's greatest gift to Avraham. She challenged him even when it caused conflict. She was his balanced eye making sure they were both going along the path they wanted. Sarai recognized that Yishmael's presence in the home was both a physical and spiritual danger to Yitzchak who would be the eventual father of the Jewish people. She asked Avraham to expel him. Avraham could not do it. It went against everything he stood for. He was a man of patience, goodness, and kindness. Hashem told him, "Whatever Sarah says, listen to her voice." Rashi says Avraham was at a lower level of prophecy than Sarah. What allowed her to juggle all these different roles? How did she know how to make the right decisions? It wasn't about I or you. It was about how do we do Hashem's will. And this was the vision that drove them.

Becoming an *eishet chayil* cannot happen in a vacuum. We need to expend energy and push ourselves in our relationship with people to become the best we can be. How do we juggle our myriad responsibilities? How do we resolve conflicts that come up in every

relationship and make it in confluence with our holier part rather than our ego part? Rashi says that Sarah was a prophetess. To receive prophecy, one had to be spiritual and work on oneself. Sarah was able to talk to Hashem. She knew what was right and wrong. The first thing in relationships is knowing who we truly are, what our values are and the truths we're willing to fight for. It's knowing which people we want to build a meaningful relationship with. Not knowing what our values are makes it impossible to build a relationship that one truly wants. We need to be able to express our needs openly and clearly. Like Sarah, we need to own our decisions. We need to feel comfortable that they fit into our value system so that nobody is vulnerable in the relationship, so that we don't drown out each other's voices, so that we are no longer doing Hashem's will.

When Sarah was acting independently she was fulfilling her own spiritual role. When she was serving Avraham or challenging him, that too was a spiritual goal. Love as a goal is really serving oneself. Even when we serve the other person, we're hoping we will get something in exchange. True love is aiming to serve Hashem.